

DRAFT
DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

USDA Forest Service R-8
Ozark National Forest
Pleasant Hill Ranger District
Johnson County, Arkansas

CCC Camp Ozone Native Grass Restoration
2-25-2016

DECISION NOTICE (DN)

Based on an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by an interdisciplinary team of Forest Service specialists, decisions regarding management actions for the vegetation management of the CCC Camp Ozone Native Grass Restoration have been made. These activities will include native grass restoration through combined use of prescribed fire, herbicide and pine/hardwood removal utilizing hand-tools and potentially limited mechanized removal.

These actions are planned to implement the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests (OSFNFs) 2005 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP) goals, objectives, and desired future condition for the heritage and recreation resources within the project area. In general, the objectives for management in the project area are to control undesirable species, reduce fuel build-up, integrated pest management to eradicate or suppress insects, diseases, and non-native invasive species (NNIS), improve/establish native grasses, increase opportunity to interpret historical features of the CCC Camp Ozone Trail, improve aesthetic values, implement low-intensity management practices to enhance Ozark Highlands Trail (OHT), and increase Forest visitor safety.

The project area of **CCC Camp Ozone** comprises a total of approximately 28 total acres; all of which are National Forest lands. The project area is located in Johnson County, Arkansas and the legal description is Township 12 North; Range 23 West; Section 28. The project area includes compartment 326 and the entire perimeter of the Developed Ozone Recreation Area.

Based on the analysis documented in the EA, it is my decision to implement **alternative 2** (see attached maps). These actions will have some impact on National Forest lands from vegetation management.

No private land exists in the project area.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT:

Pine Thinning – Pine thinning of the project area will not exceed 28 acres.

Salvage of Dead, Down, and /or Damaged Timber: The Pleasant Hill Ranger District is susceptible to natural occurrences such as severe drought, wildfire, tornadoes, windstorms, lightning strikes, insect and disease outbreaks, catastrophic ice storms, natural mortality, and human-caused events such as arson and residual material from implemented management activities (i.e. ponds, midstory reduction, thinning, and prescribed burning). These occurrences create hazards for the public and have negative effects on the overall health of the forest. This action will allow the District Ranger to respond to situations within the CCC Camp Ozone project boundaries where dead, down or damaged trees pose a threat to the public or the health and well-being of the forest in a consistent and timely manner. If the District waits until an incident occurs before making the decision to remove the dead, down, or damaged trees through a salvage or firewood sale, a time lag of several months or more could pass before the decision will be implemented. In many cases this time delay is unacceptable because of hazards to the public and/or it could cause the value of the timber product to degrade significantly due to insect and fungal infestations of damaged trees.

Prior to conducting salvage and/or regeneration operations within the CCC Camp Ozone project area boundaries, site-specific documentation for each salvage and regeneration action will be prepared and retained by the District. As a minimum, that documentation will have a statement of heritage resource survey requirements and clearance type (categorical exclusion or project notification, or other written agreement between the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Office, affected Native American Tribes, and the OSFNFs), stand prescription cards with details of the current stand and a regeneration plan to return the affected area back to its desired future condition as well as a statement of effects on proposed, endangered, threatened, or sensitive species (TES). Documentation will include the location (compartment and stand), estimated area affected (acreage), a map of the impacted area(s), an estimated volume of timber to be removed, identification of the watershed containing the affected area, and identification of the management area within which the affected area lies and actions to be conducted. Each salvage site will be reviewed by the timber assistant and the timber sale administrator or other qualified staff prior to commencement of salvage operations. Salvage and/or regeneration operations will be conducted within the project area boundaries following the guidelines listed in the 2005 RLRMP.

WILDLIFE HABITAT IMPROVEMENT

Herbicide Application for Herbaceous Vegetation Improvement – This action will occur in project area. Application of herbicide will be used to reduce shrub layer vegetation further and benefit native grass species. This treatment is proposed for the entire project area of approximately 28 acres.

PRESCRIBED BURNING

Prescribed burning will help reduce hazardous fuels and wildfire risk, improve wildlife habitat, and be utilized for heritage and recreation improvements and to re-introduce/establish native grasses to the project area.

Prescribed fire will serve to re-introduce fire into a fire-adapted ecosystem. Portions of the project area will be burned on an approximate 3-10 year fire return interval, based on best available science regarding beneficial fire-return intervals for the project area.

ROADWORK

No roadwork will be necessary for implementing activities analyzed in the EA.

HERITAGE RESOURCES

The remains of Camp Ozone were recorded as archeological site 3JO0362 in 1993 during planning for the Ozone Campground Interpretive Development project (PN 93-10-04-03). A total of 29 site features were documented as well as three walkways and areas of domestic vegetation (iris, daffodils, yucca). In 1996, an additional feature – powder magazine – was documented and added to the site form. The Camp is eligible for nomination to the National Register. In 2008-2009, the CCC Camp Ozone Interpretive Trail was constructed and opened to the public, with an approximately 0.25 mile handicap-accessible trail and signage interpreting camp history.

No other archeological sites have been recorded within the proposed project area.

Should any additional sites be found during project implementation, they will be examined by a professional archeologist, who will prescribe appropriate mitigation measures.

Based on these findings, all sites will be preserved intact and no significant effects will occur to historical or prehistoric sites that may be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

Implementation of alternative 2 using the mitigation measures as shown on pages 3-5 of the EA will have some effects on the environment. These effects are stated on pages 5-35 of the EA. Environmental effects by various resource categories are briefly described as follows:

Water – The project area and the sub-watershed analysis area support streams and rivers that have a dendritic drainage pattern. Dendritic drainage patterns typically have branching tributaries, which can concentrate precipitation across a wide area into one main stream channel. The primary streams that are found in the vicinity of the project area include a tributary to Little Piney Creek approximately 0.6 miles southeast of the site and Mulberry River approximately 0.8 miles northwest of the site. The Mulberry River is a designated Wild and Scenic River but is in a different watershed than the project area. The creeks and tributaries flow south and join Big Piney Creek approximately 23 miles downstream of the proposed project area. Big Piney Creek then flows into Piney Bay where the city of Clarksville has a municipal water intake.

The cumulative effects analysis indicates minimal risks to the water resource's current condition. Additionally, it should be possible to schedule these activities over time instead of

instantaneously as predicted by the analysis, thus further reducing the possibility of acute effects. Through the use of forest plan standards and the use of Arkansas Silviculture BMPs, the activities scheduled for implementation should not pose additional risks to water quality or designated uses. Monitoring in the form of subsequent BMP compliance checks should be adequate to discern any adverse effects which may result from the implementation of the proposed action.

Soils - Soils are well drained and range from shallow to deep. Soils have mostly recovered from past disturbances except the areas under roads and trails. The soils are well covered with vegetation, duff, stones, and limbs.

The area that is proposed for native grass restoration shows little to no evidence of detrimental soil disturbance consisting of rutting, displacement of the top soil, compaction, erosion, or severe burning. There are no known future activities in addition to the proposed activities that would impact soils. Disturbed areas will be seeded with native grasses. Soil disturbance that would potentially result from the proposed activities are expected to be within the RLRMP standard that requires soils dedicated to growing vegetation, the organic layers, topsoil, and root mat will be left intact over 85% of activity areas.

Herbicides – The herbicides glyphosate, triclopyr, imazapic, imazapyr, and hexazinone have the potential to be applied for site preparation. Non-ionic surfactants may be mixed with herbicides in order to improve application success. With the use of listed mitigation measures, no significant long-term degradation or cumulative effects, including state standards, on soils and water quality are anticipated from implementation of alternative 2.

Direct effects, occurring at time of application, to birds or large mammals are unlikely, since these species are likely to move from the area when project activities are implemented. Although direct effects to amphibians are more likely since contact with herbicide could be absorbed through the skin, amphibians are likely to be under logs, rocks or leaves, making direct contact (from spray) with chemicals less likely. Direct effects to other non-target plants occurring in these habitats could occur. Application methods, including directed application to target foliage or freshly cut stumps/surfaces, will minimize the possibility of direct contamination to non-target species. The most plausible possible direct effects to humans will be to workers from continuing work in contaminated clothing. Proper handling and cleanliness of personal protective gear will mitigate this possibility. More implausible direct effects to the general public may occur via walking through recently treated (wet) vegetation in shorts and consuming contaminated fruit.

Direct and indirect effects from chemical spills of all herbicides analyzed - to humans, wildlife and plants are minimized by following proper mixing and handling procedures, Forest-Wide Standards and BMPs.

Adverse, indirect effects to management indicator species (MIS) and habitats treated with all chemicals are reduced given that applicators treat target plants only and field formulations contain diluted concentrations of chemical. Additionally, mitigation measures, BMPs and Forest-Wide Standards will be used.

Cumulative effects from using herbicides as proposed also pose no significant risk of causing unintended negative cumulative effects due to their short half-lives and the selectivity of the proposed treatment methods.

Air - For air quality, cumulative effects include all reasonable and foreseeable activities that produce pollutants. Emissions from prescribed burning and from vehicles during management activities will contribute greenhouse gases and pollutants to the atmosphere, but the volume of these emissions will be inconsequential and are not expected to have a cumulative impact on current air quality.

Burns will follow approved burning plans to manage the smoke and burning intensities. Mitigation measures will ensure compliance with federal, state and local clean air requirements, and no long-term cumulative effects are anticipated from implementation of the proposed action. Arkansas voluntary smoke management guidelines will be followed to assure adherence to air quality regulations and prevent negative impacts to smoke sensitive areas.

Climate Change - Some of the carbon currently sequestered in vegetation and soils will be released back to the atmosphere. In the short-term, greenhouse gas emissions and alteration to the carbon cycle will be caused by hazardous fuel reduction activities, harvests, and thinning of overstocked stands. In the long term, however, these actions will also increase the forest's ability to sequester additional carbon, improve the forest's resilience to the potential impacts of climate change and decrease the potential for uncharacteristically severe wildfires. Timber harvest will remove some of the mature stems with diminished ability to sequester additional carbon; some of the carbon sequestered in harvested stems will continue to be stored in manufactured wood products. Residual stems and regeneration in the proposed project area will continue to sequester and store carbon.

Road Work – No roadwork is needed for the implementation of this project.

Heritage Resources – Improved access and visibility to cultural sites and features increases the potential for damage from natural and human action (i.e. impacts of illegal or inappropriate OHV usage, and looting). Project components with potential to directly affect archeological sites primarily include vegetative management (prescribed burning, removal of woody vegetation). Any mechanized pine/hardwood removal will be restricted to areas outside site boundaries/features. If the prescribed mitigation measures discussed above are properly implemented, project activities are not be expected to adversely affect cultural resources.

Although the no action alternative will eliminate risk of inadvertent effects to cultural resources from planned activities, it will result in a marked increase in potential damage from unmanaged and unmonitored resources. Intrusive vegetation will not be controlled. Fuel load will accumulate, and the risk of uncontrolled fires, potentially damaging to cultural resources, will increase. The lack of federal presence in the area could be expected to increase the potential for damage to cultural resources from looting, vandalism, and other illegal or unmanaged use of the Forest.

Vegetation and Vegetation Diversity – This alternative will restore native grass species and allow the Ozone CCC Camp to be properly interpreted.

The effects of prescribed burning and other vegetation controls will improve visibility for more penetrating views from the highway, the OHT, and the CCC interpretive trail; more herbaceous vegetation would ensue for wildlife and flora species, benefiting quail, deer, and neo-tropical migratory birds and flowering plants.

Implementation of this alternative is not expected to have a negative cumulative impact on vegetation. The forest condition will be improved and left in a more sustainable condition.

Wildlife – The proposed action is predicted to have negative short term impacts on 8 of 13 management indicator species analyzed. Negative impacts will be primarily short term disturbance of individual animals and potential loss of nests. Viability of populations as a whole will not be reduced (Taylor, 2013).

Use of the selected management actions as described in this Environmental Assessment would be of long term benefit to MIS that rely upon forest ecosystems, particularly oak/pine ecosystems, for habitat. In summary, the proposed action is predicted to have positive long term effects on 13 of 13 management indicator species analyzed. Although some individual negative long term effects are predicted, populations of all MIS will be expected to remain viable in the Ozark Highlands and on the National Forest (Taylor, 2013).

TES (Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Wildlife Species) – Eleven species were not seen during field surveys, but possibly occur in the activity area based on habitat observed or the field surveys were conducted when the species is not recognizable (OAR “6”); 1 bird species (bald eagle), 5 mammal species (Ozark big-eared bat, gray bat, Eastern small-footed bat, Northern long-eared bat and Indiana bat), 1 isopod species (*Lirceus* isopod), and 4 plant species (Ouachita leadplant, Bush’s poppymallow, Moore’s larkspur, and Ozark spiderwort).

The occurrence analysis results table shows one plant species (Ozark chinquapin), was identified within the activity area (OAR “5”).

The proposed action and action alternatives were all designed to totally incorporate all Forest-wide standards, and direction provided by the USFWS related to the conservation of all listed bat species.

There are no foreseeable, additional management activities in the area (not associated with this project) that would directly or indirectly affect the Ozark big-eared bat, Gray bat, and Indiana bat or cause additive or synergistic adverse cumulative impacts in conjunction with the proposed action, for these species.

With implementation of Forest-wide standards from the RLRMP which were developed in coordination with the USFWS during the revision process, the determination of effect for these three bat species related to this proposed project is: “may affect – not likely to adversely affect.”

There are no foreseeable, additional management activities in the area (not associated with this project) that would directly or indirectly affect the northern long-eared bat, or cause additive or synergistic adverse cumulative impacts in conjunction with the proposed action.

Human Health – There is a risk of worker injury during the completion of manual vegetation treatments and prescribed fire. Proper use of PPE, adherence to job hazard analyses and safety practices mitigate this risk. Risk to the public from these types of work is minimal. However, with proper handling/transport methods, use of signing in application areas (where required), use of proper application methods and equipment, and use of required PPE, risk of herbicide exposure to workers and the public is mitigated with implementation of alternative 2.

Removal of dead and/or aging trees through thinning operations and fireline preparation will make the forest safer for visitors, through reducing the incidence of falling snags and limbs.

Use of prescribed burning will lessen potential wildland fire occurrence, wildland fire severity and unplanned smoke emissions. Strict adherence to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and 2005 RLMRP guidelines, a site-specific burning plan and Arkansas Voluntary Smoke Management Guidelines will limit the area where specific burn plans, and Arkansas Voluntary Smoke Management Guidelines ensure that smoke or other combustion products do not reach, or significantly affect, smoke sensitive areas. Smoke monitoring during and after prescribed burns will be conducted to determine compliance with smoke management guidelines, and for potential future mitigation required for downwind smoke sensitive areas. These actions will ensure that the requirements of the Clean Air Act, EPA air standards, and state requirements will be met and there should be no smoke related long-term or cumulative effects from implementation of prescribed fire.

Management Areas, Aesthetics, and Recreation –Vegetation management and prescribed burning will reduce pine regeneration in the project area while promoting the establishment of native grasses.

Planned activities will have some short-term effects on aesthetics and recreational users may suffer temporary inconveniences from the implementation of planned work. No significant long-term or cumulative effects on these aesthetic and recreation resources are anticipated. Implementation of alternative 2 will have no long-term negative effects or cumulative negative effects.

Other alternatives considered in detail were:

Alternative 1. No Action: Analysis of this alternative measured the effects of not implementing the proposed vegetation management actions on the physical, biological, and human health, components of the environment. Implementation of this alternative will not allow for the restoration of native grasses. Implementation of this alternative will not increase plant and

wildlife diversity. Implementation of this alternative will not reduce forest fuels or reduce risk to forest ecosystems. Implementation of this alternative will not increase or improve recreational uses on the Forest. Implementation of this alternative will not improve Forest visitor safety. The objectives of the 2005 RLRMP for vegetation, heritage, and recreation management will not be met.

My reasons for choosing **Alternative 2** were:

Overall, I viewed this proposal as the one best meeting the goals and objectives of the 2005 RLRMP while still addressing the issues and concerns raised by the public. Specifically, the reasons are:

- The selected alternative, as mitigated, addressed the issue of immediate and cumulative effects from past, current, and proposed actions on vegetation management. There should be no long-term or cumulative effects on the environment from the planned actions.
- The issue of effects of past, present, and proposed activities on vegetation is analyzed in the EA pp. 5-35.
- Approximately 28 acres will be restored to native grasses.
- Prescribed fire will serve to re-introduce fire into a fire-adapted ecosystem, reduce pine regeneration, and promote the establishment of native grasses.
- When implemented, alternative 2 will be monitored.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS (FONSI):

Based on my review of the above analysis and from past experience, I have determined that the proposed actions are not a major Federal action either individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary. This determination is based on the following factors (40 CFR 1508.27):

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this action should not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (EA, pp. 5-35).
2. The actions should not significantly affect public health or safety (EA, pp. 18-21).
3. The project will not significantly affect any unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, ecologically critical areas, or the Ozark Highlands Trail (OHT) (EA, pp. 22-28, 29-30).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, pp. 5-35).

5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, pp. 5-35).
6. The actions in this decision will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
7. There will be no cumulatively significant impacts on the environment. The cumulative effects of the proposed actions have been analyzed with consideration of other similar activities on adjacent lands, in past actions, and in foreseeable future actions (EA, pp. 5-35).
8. The actions will not affect any sites listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places nor cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (EA, pp. 22-28).
9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened plant or animal species, or their critical habitat (EA, pp. 31-35).
10. None of the actions threaten to lead to violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pp. 5-35).

For water quality management, state-approved Best Management Practices (BMPs), which are incorporated into the mitigation measures, will be used for this project. These BMPs are from the state water quality management plan and have been designed with the goal of producing water that meets state water quality standards. The project will be monitored to ensure BMPs are implemented. If implementing BMPs on a specific site results in effects significantly higher than anticipated because of unforeseen site factors or events, appropriate corrective measures will be considered and implemented.

Actions are also consistent with the Antiquities Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and all other applicable state and federal laws and regulations. Additionally, the best available scientific data was used when selecting and analyzing the effects of the proposed action.

OTHER FINDINGS:

1. The actions of the project are consistent with the OSFNFs 2005 RLRMP goals and objectives. All of the actions associated with this project occur within Management Areas: **2.C Developed Recreation Area**. All of the planned actions associated with these projects are consistent with the management prescriptions and management practices for this Management Area. The actions are also consistent with the 2005 RLRMP because mitigation measures for impacts shall be fully applied in implementation. The project is feasible and reasonable, restores ecosystem health, protects the environment while promoting native grasses.

2. The actions of this project comply with the ecological, social, and economic requirements of 36 CFR 219.19 by following the Forest-wide standards and guides. These actions also meet the General Management requirements and Mitigation Measures in the Record of Decision (ROD) of the FEIS for Vegetation Management in the Ozark/Ouachita Mountains. The requirements met are:
 1. The activities chosen are best suited for the multiple-use goals of the area.
 3. Alternative 2 was not selected based upon the output of timber. This alternative provides a positive effect on forest health, recreation, heritage, and wildlife.
 4. The activities chosen will not adversely affect residual trees in adjacent stands.
 5. The activities chosen, with mitigating measures, avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of soil and water resources.
 6. The activities provide for meeting 2005 RLRMP objectives for all resources.
 7. The activities are practical in terms of vegetation management.

IMPLEMENTATION:

This decision is subject to to pre-decisional objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. A written Notice of Objection must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published (February 24, 2016). Only those who provided substantive comments regarding the proposed action during the scoping and/or comment period will be accepted as objectors.

The EA and draft DN/FONSI are available on-line at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/osfnf/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5212216>

Once you have reached this site, scroll to the bottom of the page and the Final EA/Draft DN will be located under the project name “CCC Camp Ozone Native Grass Restoration”.

These documents along with any additional information are also available for review at the Pleasant Hill Ranger District, 2591 Hwy 21 North, Clarksville, AR. 72830.

How to Object and Timeframe

The opportunity to object ends 45 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the Johnson County **Graphic**. The publication date of the legal notice in the **Graphic** (2/24/16) is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection, and that those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Objections will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely,

specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after designated comment opportunities §218.8(c).

The objection must contain the minimum content requirements specified in §218.8(d) and incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in §218.8(b). It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

Written objections, including attachments, must be filed with: Reggie Blackwell, Forest Supervisor, 605 West Main Street, Russellville, AR. 72801. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered objections are: 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic objections must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc, .docx) to ozarkobjection@fs.fed.us.

Please state "CCC Camp Ozone Native Grass Restoration" in the subject line when providing electronic objections, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

PAT KOWALEWYCZ
District Ranger

Date